

Mayors of Hoopeston

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Richcheck
Johnson
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Newman
Browne
Crumley
Young
Smock
Dukes
Ault
Flint
DeWitt
Crusinberry



Alba Honeywell, Hoopeston Mayor 1879-80.

Y R R E B N I S U R C N K N Y
G K O G E R T G P I E R C E T
S C T T I W E D B W B L L N T
C O F Y H P B B M R P P F C I
U M A R Y O F A H F O Y L L R
N S W N L W N I I E V W I R R
N O M P L X R E N E A Z N V E
I H C C E C I N Y L X T T E M
N A F R N Z C Q O W E W O M F
G M E U H E H S B S E Y I N W
H I R M S D C G M T N L T I O
A L R L U U H W N L Z H L M X
M T E E B K E T W U M S O P O
Q O N Y X E E W R A O N K J P
O N C O S S K A I N K Y Q O N

Carol's History Corner

Hoopeston's Almost Astronaut

By Carol Hicks

Hoopeston is a small rural town in northern Vermilion County, the second largest in the county, founded in 1871 but not incorporated until 1874. The town is unique in that it began as three towns, Hoopeston, North Hoopeston, and Leeds and is the only town in the United States named Hoopeston, possibly in the entire world.

Hoopeston boasts of a Big Ten Ohio coach, Thad Matta, as a former graduate of Hoopeston High School as well as Frank Gustine, John Greer High School alumnus, who played for the Pittsburgh Pirates when he turned 19 in 1939. Another memorable person, Jean Hixson, also a Hoopestonite and alumnus of John Greer High School, earned a pilot's license at 18 years of age in 1940, served in the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) during World War II, and become a member of the Lovelace program in Albuquerque, New Mexico as one of the Mercury 13 astronauts in 1961.

Jean Hixson, born 30 September 1922 in Hoopeston, the daughter of Robert and Pearl M. (Stewart) Hixson, developed a passion for flying at an early age and, once Hoopeston briefly had an airport, began her flying lessons at 16-years of age, earning a pilot's license by age 18.

During World War II, Jean decided to join the Air Force to become Hoopeston's first woman pilot. She graduated from the Woman's Air Force Service Pilot School at Sweetwater, Texas, Aug. 14, 1944, receiving her wings showing that she "is competent to handle any plane that is worthy of the name," according to an article in the Chronicle-Herald. Jean's main job flying a B-25 twin-engine bomber as an engineering air force pilot was ferrying planes to various fields, war zones and transporting war personnel.

After the war, Jean became a flight instructor in Akron, Ohio. During her free time as a flight instructor, she studied at Akron University to obtain a degree in Elementary and Secondary Education, starting her new career as a teacher in 1952, retiring in 1983, and retiring from the Air Force Reserves as a full colonel in 1982.

Jean earned the Amelia



JEAN HIXSON

Earhart award In 1948 for advancement of aeronautics development and in 1949 achieved the rank of lieutenant in Akron's first Women's Air Force Reserve, earning the rank of Captain by 1958.

Jean and Mrs. Barbara Jenison, both from Illinois, co-piloted a Cessna 180 in the Annual All-Women Transcontinental Air Race in 1949. The race began in San Diego, California and ended in Charleston South Carolina, following a required route set up by the Transcontinental committee through Arizona, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia.

Jean, a fourth grade teacher at the Forest Hill, Ohio grade school, became the first teacher to fly through the sound barrier in a Lockheed F-94C Starfire Jet in 1958. She achieved this goal to fly with an Air Force pilot after winning the 50th Anniversary Powered Flight contest.

In 1960, Jean Hixson was one of thirteen women pilots invited to participate in training to assess women's fitness as potential astronauts. In the summer of 1961, Jean went to Lovelace's Woman in Space program in Albuquerque, New

Mexico for a series of astronaut tests, the same testing that male astronauts endured. She passed all the tests and was considered "the best of the crew" by her peers.

"NASA representatives George Low and Astronauts John Glenn and Scott Carpenter testified (at a congressional hearing) that the women could not qualify as astronaut candidates. NASA required all astronauts to be graduates of military jet test piloting programs and have engineering degrees," according to an article written by author Margaret Weitekamp and Steve Garber, NASA History Web Curator.

The reluctance of testimony for women as astronauts and the fact that NASA did not start the program, but was a privately funded program by NASA physician William Randolph Lovelace, prevented Jean Hixson and the other ladies invited to Albuquerque from serving as astronauts and Jean from becoming Hoopeston's first female astronaut.

Jean Hixson died 21 September 1984 and was bought home to Hoopeston for burial in Floral Hill Cemetery, Hoopeston's almost astronaut.